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ABSTRACT

This investigator found and reviewed fifty-one studies reported in the literature on individualized reading between 1937 and 1971. Of this number, forty of these studies were controlled at least to the extent of using control groups. In twenty-four cases the results favored the individualized reading group. Only one author reported higher reading achievement for the basal control group. Fifteen researchers reported no significant difference between groups. A note of caution seems warranted concerning simply quantifying the studies as revealing superiority one way or another. As most researchers know, unless a significant difference in achievement is manifested between groups, there is some reluctance on the part of researchers and editors to publish the findings. Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that not all studies pertaining to individualized reading have been included in the literature. (Author)

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SUMMARIZING RESEARCH PERTAINING TO INDIVIDUALIZED READING

Interest in individualized reading has spanned four decades, and throughout this period many researchers have experimented with individualized reading instruction. A summarization of the research evidence would serve a useful purpose permitting teachers the opportunity to evaluate these investigations and to formulate a judgement about whether individualized reading can be used with successful results.

Even though the concept of individualized reading is as old as the dame schools, initial quasi-experiments with this approach seems to have occurred in the thirties when three uncontrolled studies were reported. (DeWitt and Agnew, 1937, and Loomis, 1939). These early individualized reading programs indicated to their authors that the results were favorable to the individualized approach. Conclusions such as these which are based on uncontrolled data must be accepted as opinion rather than fact. Although the nature of these reports as factual evidence is discounted, these early attempts at individualized reading did lead the way for further work in this area during the next decades.

The earliest controlled study involving individualized reading was conducted by Anderson (1946). Third grade students were the subjects with the experimental group using individualized reading and the control group using a basal program. The author reported no significant difference for the two groups.

Table I illustrates significant information about these early studies.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

By the fifties, attention became focused sharply on individualized reading. Educators had become increasingly aware that students were individuals with wide

ranges in ability and learning rate. Considering this fact, individualized reading seemed to be the most likely developmental approach taking into account the assumption that more learning occurs when students are self-paced rather than when grouped. As a result of this high tide of enthusiasm for individualizing instruction throughout the fifties and sixties, a number of studies were conducted to assess the merits of individualized reading.

At least sixteen studies were reported during the decade of the fifties. Although not all the experiments were controlled, nine of the sixteen were. Table 2 reveals the details of these investigations.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Of the nine controlled studies reported in which individualized reading was the experimental treatment, seven authors reported favorable results for the experimental groups over the control groups using basal programs. Two authors reported no significant difference between the groups studied. It is noteworthy that not one basal group in these nine studies exceeded the achievement of the individualized reading groups. These results heightened the interest in individualized reading in the sixties when even more studies were reported than in the previous two and a half decades!

Many reasons caused this upsurge of interest in individualized reading both from inside the profession and outside. Reactions from the successful Sputnik venture by a foreign power caused much turbulance in education. Not only were the sciences targeted for criticism, but reading too received attention. Of course, Rudolph Flesch with his book Why Johnny Can't Read had preceded this new eruption of interest so that reading educators were already manning the defenses

when this renewed concern manifested itself. From within the profession concern developed about the traditional basal reading program. Basals were frequently challenged as making little provision for meeting individual student needs, as not being founded on sound linguistic principles, or containing sufficient phonic drill. These and other concerns seems to have led professionals in search of other materials and ideas. Many new approaches and mediums were developed to teach reading. Interest in the modified alphabets, in extrinsic phonic programs, and in the new linguistic series caused excitement furthering comparative studies, some of which involved individualized reading.

The high interest in individualized reading generated in the fifties was superceded by intensified activity with individualized reading in the sixties when thirty or more studies were reported in the literature. Besides increasing in quantity, the studies in the sixties were more frequently controlled than the earlier ones. Of the thirty investigations reviewed by this author, only one lacked controls.

In analyzing the thirty studies reported or the twenty-nine controlled ones, the most noteworthy feature is that sixteen researchers stated that the individualized reading group exceeded the control group in achievement. These studies covered all elementary grade levels and a few secondary grades. Only one study (Galotto 1961) was reported in which the control group, using basal readers and grouped into three ability groups, exceeded the achievement of the individualized reading group. Twelve studies were reported in which no significant difference was the result. Thus, the box score for the sixties reads:

Individualized Reading Groups	16
Control Groups	1
Ties	12

Table 3 reveals the studies reported in the sixties.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The most recent study on individualized reading, and the only one found for the seventies, was reported by Davis and Lucas (1971). In comparing individualized reading to a basal program with seventh and eighth graders as subjects, it appeared that the IRG attained a significant superior reading rate, but the higher achievement in vocabulary and comprehension was not statistically significant.

SUMMARY - This investigator found and reviewed fifty-one studies reported in the literature on individualized reading between 1937 and 1971. Of this number, forty of these studies were controlled at least to the extent of using control groups. In twenty-four cases the results favored the individualized reading group. Only one author reported higher reading achievement for the basal control group. Fifteen researchers reported no significant difference between groups. The summary scoreboard reads:

IRG...24 CRG...1 with 15 ties

A note of caution seems warranted concerning simply quantifying the studies as revealing superiority one way or another. As most researchers know, unless a significant difference in achievement is manifested between groups, there is some reluctance on the part of researchers and editors to publish the findings. Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that not all studies pertaining to individualized reading have been included in the literature.

CONCLUSIONS - Summarization of the publicized research pertaining to individualized reading over four decades reveals that individualized reading programs can facilitate reading achievement to the extent of basal reading programs, and that more often than not, individualized reading programs have facilitated higher reading achievement than basal programs in controlled studies. Further, the summarization reveals that individualized reading has been used successfully at practically all grade levels.

TABLE 1

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG	Results Favored CRG	Additional Notes
1937	Dewitt & Agnew	1	20	None	No	No basis for comparison		
1939	Gumlick	Primary	24 Classes	None	No	"		
1939	Loomis	K - 6	81	None	No	"		Researcher reported impressive results for Grades 3 through 6, but due to lack of controls, positive affirmation in favor of the individualized approach must be omitted.
1946	Anderson	3	--	Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		

TABLE 2

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG CRG	Additional Notes
1951	Schmidt	1	--	None	No		Group approximated normal expectancy
1954	Criqui	8	24	None	No		Researcher reported pupils gained from 7.8 to 8.8 months in 9 months of time.
1956	Oser	5 - 8	81	No	No		
1957	Walker	4 - 6		Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.	
1957	Sperber			Basal	Yes	Yes	IRG read more books than CRG
1957	McChristy	2	8 Matched Pairs	Basal	Yes	Yes	
1957	Wood	5	37	--	No		Using Ind. Rdg. group gained 16 months in achievement.
1958	Wiggins	6	30	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes	IRG made 15 months gain and AG made 13 months gain over 4½ month period.
1959	Acinapuro	3 - 6	156	Three Ability Groups Basal	Yes	Yes	
1959	McHugh	4 - 6	35 Classes		Compared to previous years ach.	Yes for Grade 6 only.	
1959	Parker	6	35	None	No		Avg. gain for 35 pupils over 6 month period was 14 months.
1959	Edwards	4	23	None	No		Avg. gain for 23 pupils over 10 month period was 13 months.
1959	Hart	6	27	None	No		Avg. gain for 27 pupils over 6 month period was 7 months.

Table 2 Continued

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG	Results Favored CRG	Additional Notes
1959	Patterson	1	Approx. 14 in each of two groups	Basal	Yes	Yes		Researcher reported that the individualized approach appeared more desirable
1959	Persig	6	130	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes		Treatment given for 8 month IRG gained 14.4 months to 9.1 months gain for control group.
1959	Pollach	Int.	235	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		

TABLE 3

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG	Results Favored CRG	Additional Notes
1960	Warford	1	15	None	No	(Yes)		Results seemed to favor Ind. Rdg. but no controls were reported.
1960	Sartain	2	660	Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		Lower I.Q. students made greater gains in word recognition using basal readers.
1960	Gresham	5		Basal	Yes	Yes		
1960	Boyd	7	240	See Notes	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		IRG used SRA Rdg. Lab. while control group was ability grouped using basal program.
1960	Safford	3 - 6	Experimental group was composed of 7 classes.	Other Methods	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1960	Braidford	1	68	Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1960	Carline		72 Classes	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1960	Carlisle	2 - 3	83	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1960	Gresham	5		Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes		IRG gained an avg. of 8 months while CRG avg. gain of 3 months. Treatment extended over 4 months.
1960	Izzo	1	68 IR 68 Control	Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1961	Sperry	1 - 3	350	Basal	Yes	Yes		
1961	Aronow	4 - 6	351	Basal	Yes	Yes		

Table 3 Continued

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG	Results Favored CRG	Additional Notes
1961	Donahue	2		Basal	Yes	Yes		
1961	Gordon & Clark	2		Basal	Yes	Yes		
1961	Noall	11-12	114		Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1961	Jones	4	52	Basal Ability Grouped		No Signi. Diff.		IRG used SRA Rdg. Lab materials
1961	Galotto	Junior High	10 Exp. 10 Control	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes		Yes	
1961	Donohue,D.	6		Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes		IRG gained 16 months. AG gained 6 months over 9 month period.
1961	Eickholz	7	2 Classes	Basal	Ye	Yes		Study involved vocabulary growth only.
1961	Baker	2 Superior Class	11 Exp. 11 Control	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1961	Cyrog	3 - 6		*	Yes	Yes		*Control was other children in school system over 7 year period.
1961	Bailey	5	22 Exp. 20 Control	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes		
1962	Adams	1	84 Exp. 88 Control	Modified Basal Program	Yes	Yes		For boys there was no sig. diff. Girls in IRG gained in visual and auditory discriminative abilities and in word recognition.
1962	Roston	1 - 2 Superior Students	23 Exp. 18 Control	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	N Signi. Diff.		

Table 3 Continued

Year	Researchers	Grade Level	No. of Subjects	Control Group Rdg. Approach	Controlled Study	Results Favored IRG	Results Favored CRG	Additional Notes
1962	Ellingson	4	24 Exp. 26 Control	Basal Ability Grouped	Yes	Yes		IRG gained 12 months. AB gained 7.7 months.
1965	Johnson	1 - 3	14 Exp. 14 Control	Basal	Yes	Yes		
1966	USOE Project (Bond et. al)	1 - 2		Basal	Yes	Yes		High and low groups gained particularl
1967	Teigland	1 - 2	134	Basal	Yes	No Signi. Diff.		
1967	Spencer	1 - 2	496	Basal	Yes	Yes		Girls appeared to do better than boys.
1968	Mellen	Primary	18	Basal	Yes	Yes		
1971	Davis & Lucas	7 - 8	267 Exp. 287 Control	Basal	Yes	Yes		Superiority for IRG was in rate. Also group was superior on all sub-tests but not statistically significant.

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